MYSTIC... THE MOST EERIE STORIES EVER TOLD!

MYSTIC

ATLAS

NO. 8

10¢

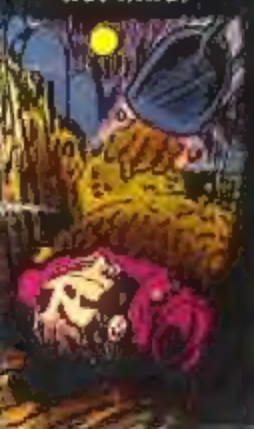
MAY

DON'T MISS THESE MYSTIC TALES!

WE MEET AT MIDNIGHT!

HOUSE FOR SALE!

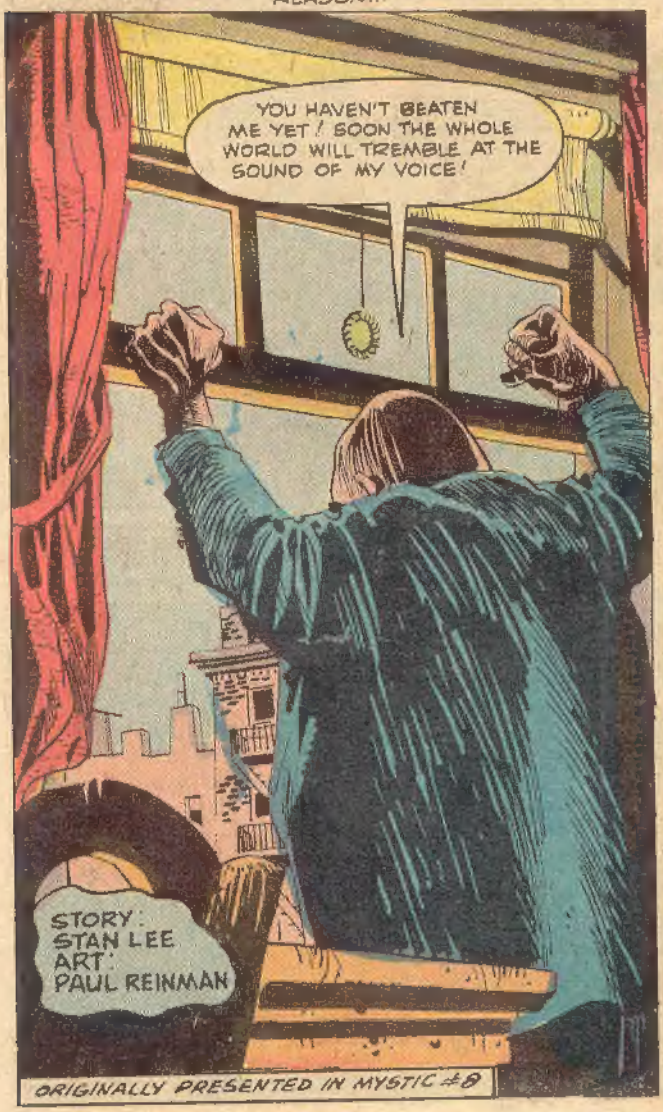
SORRY, MISTER HOPKINS!



"A MONSTER AMONG US!"

WE MEET AT MIDNIGHT!

I HATED THE WORLD! I HATED IT AS VIOLENTLY AS A MAN COULD HATE ANYTHING! AND I HAD A GOOD REASON...



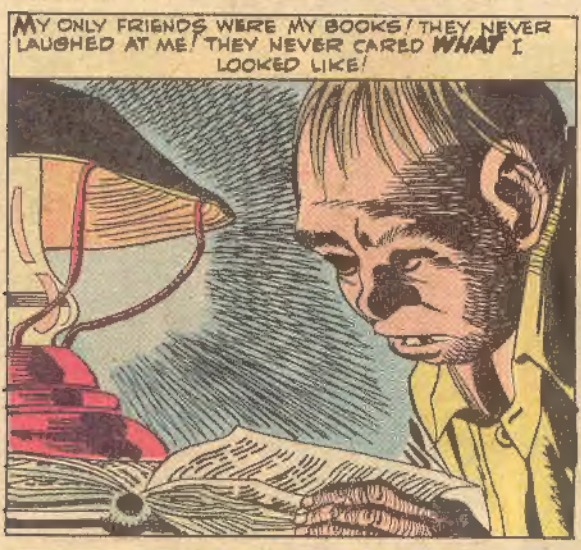
ORIGINALLY PRESENTED IN MYSTIC #8

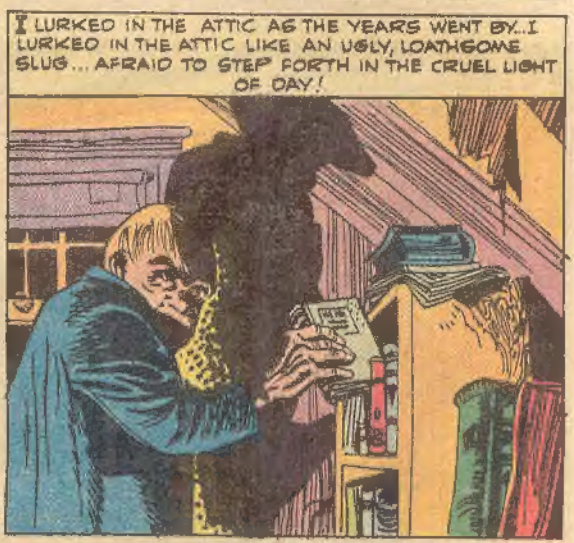
ALL MY LIFE I HAD BEEN AN UGLY CARICATURE OF A MAN...

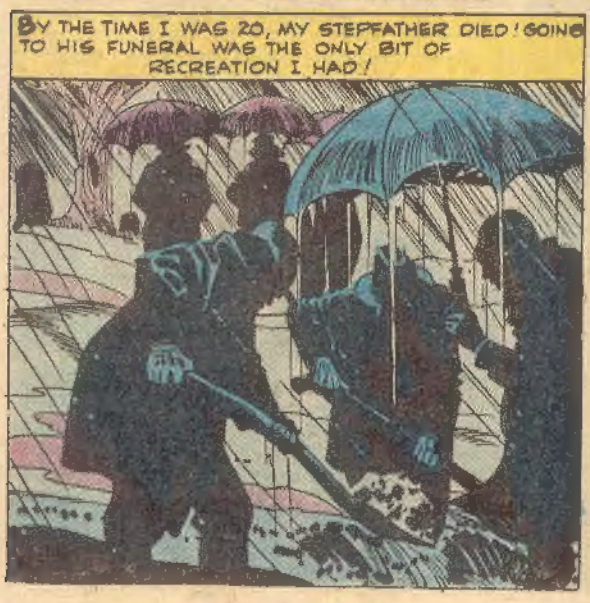
EVEN AS A CHILD, PEOPLE COULDN'T BEAR TO LOOK AT ME...

OTHER CHILDREN WOULD STARE MERCILESSLY AT ME AS I WALKED IN THE STREET...
THERE GOES HUGO BLORE!
I GET THE WILLIES JUST LOOKIN' AT HIM!

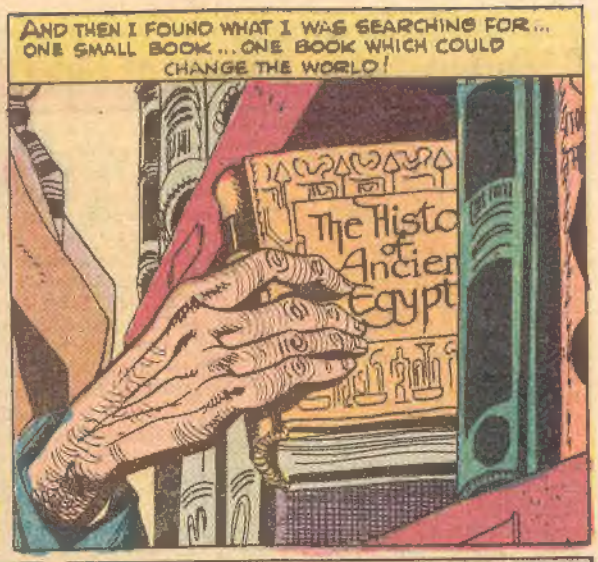
EVEN MY OWN STEPFATHER COULDN'T STAND THE SIGHT OF ME!
HUGO, I'M EXPECTING COMPANY! GO UPSTAIRS BEFORE THEY COME! I DON'T WANT TO MAKE THEM FEEL UN-COMFORTABLE!


MY ONLY FRIENDS WERE MY BOOKS! THEY NEVER LAUGHED AT ME! THEY NEVER CARED WHAT I LOOKED LIKE!

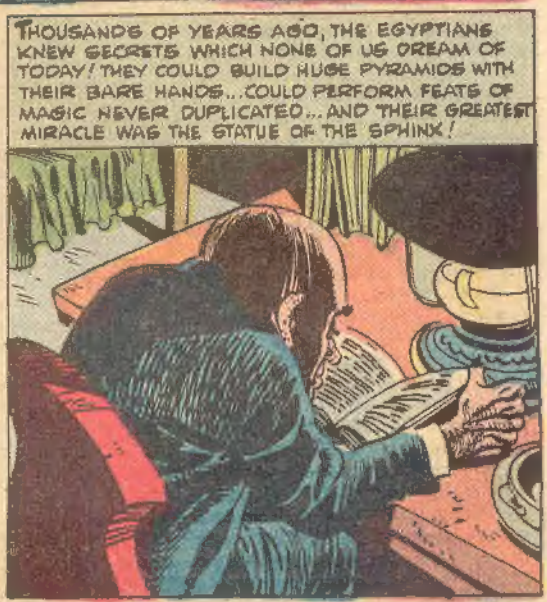

I LURKED IN THE ATTIC AS THE YEARS WENT BY..I LURKED IN THE ATTIC LIKE AN UGLY, LOATHSOME SLUG... AFRAID TO STEP FORTH IN THE CRUEL LIGHT OF DAY!


BY THE TIME I WAS 20, MY STEPFATHER DIED! GOING TO HIS FUNERAL WAS THE ONLY BIT OF RECREATION I HAD!

I RETURNED TO THE HOUSE! IT WAS EMPTY NOW... AND QUIET... AND IT WAS ALL MINE...WHERE NO ONE COULD EVER ENTER TO LAUGH AT ME! IT WAS MINE!



FOR RIGHT THERE...IN BLACK AND WHITE...THE BOOK SAID...
he man who can solve th
riddle of the Sphinx can be-
come the most famou
man in the
world!


THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, THE EGYPTIANS KNEW SECRETS WHICH NONE OF US DREAM OF TODAY! THEY COULD BUILD HUGE PYRAMIDS WITH THEIR BARE HANDS...COULD PERFORM FEATS OF MAGIC NEVER DUPLICATED...AND THEIR GREATEST MIRACLE WAS THE STATUE OF THE SPHINX!

NO MAN KNOWS WHY THE SPHINX WAS BUILT, OR HOW! NOR DO WE KNOW WHAT THE SPHINX REALLY IS! BUT HIDDEN SOMEWHERE IN THE SPHINX IS THE SECRET OF THE GREATEST MAGIC AND POWER ON EARTH...IF ANY MAN DARES TO TRY TO FIND IT!

I KNEW WHAT I HAD TO DO! I WOULD GO TO EGYPT AND SPEND MY LIFE TRYING TO DISCOVER THE SPHINX'S SECRET...FOR IF I SUCCEEDED, I WOULD BE THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE WORLD...

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

DURING THE OCEAN TRIP I COULD THINK OF NOTHING ELSE BUT THE POWER I WOULD HOLD AFTER I DISCOVERED THE SECRET OF THE SPHINX!
FINALLY I STOOD IN THE SHADOW OF THE SPHINX ITSELF...
I FELT THE EYES OF THE SPHINX STARE AT ME... AS THOUGH IT WAS ALIVE! SHIVERS RAN UP AND DOWN MY SPINE! I WAS GRIPPED IN A SPELL WHICH I COULDN'T BREAK!
AND THEN I HEARD A VOICE... AND I KNEW IT WAS THE VOICE OF THAT MONSTROUS HALF-MAN, HALF-DEMON WHICH LAY CROUCHED IN FRONT OF ME!
IF YOU WOULD LEARN THE SECRET OF THE SPHINX, RETURN ALONE, AT MIDNIGHT!
I DIDN'T QUESTION IT! I DIDN'T STOP TO ASK WHY I SHOULD HAVE BEEN CHOSEN OVER ALL THE OTHERS IN THE WORLD TO LEARN THE GREAT MYSTERIES OF ANCIENT EGYPT! ALL I KNEW WAS THAT I NEVER TOOK MY EYES OFF MY WATCH... WAITING FOR MIDNIGHT...
AT THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT I WAS THERE... WAITING FOR A COMMAND FROM THE SILENT, STARING STATUE WHICH WAS OLDER THAN TIME...

THE MUMMY LIVES AGAIN— IN THE LATEST, GREATEST ISSUE OF STRANGE TALES!

FINALLY IT SPOKE ... AND I OBEYED BLINDLY!
ENTER THE PASSAGEWAY WHICH LEADS TO MY CORE!
NOW FOLLOW THE WINDING CORRIDOR WHICH WILL LEAD YOU TO THE DEPTHS WHERE DWELLS THE SPIRIT OF THE SPHINX!
DOWN...DOWN...DOWN I WALKED...UNTIL MY HEART COULD HARDLY BEAT...UNTIL MY LUNGS COULD STAND THE STALE, FETID AIR NO LONGER!
DON'T HESITATE... DON'T QUESTION! YOU TREAD WHERE NO MORTAL HAS EVER TROD BEFORE!
AND THEN I STOPPED...I HAD FOUND THE HEART OF THE SPHINX...I WAS AT THE END OF MY JOURNEY!
STOP! LISTEN TO THE MESSAGE OF THE SPHINX...
I AM OLDER THAN TIME... AND WISER THAN THE AGES! I HAVE SEEN ALL AND I KNOW ALL! THOUGH I SLEEP FOREVER, I SHALL NEVER DIE!
MEN HAVE SOUGHT THE SECRET OF THE SPHINX FOR COUNTLESS AGES, BUT YOU ARE THE FIRST TO ENTER THE CHAMBER OF THE FLAME! WHY DO YOU DISTURB MY REPOSE?
I'VE COME TO LEARN THE SECRETS KNOWN TO THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS WHO BUILT YOU! THE SECRETS WHICH WILL MAKE ME RULER OF THE WORLD!
5

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

I WARN YOU...NO MAN MAY KNOW THESE SECRETS!
I MUST KNOW! I MUST DESTROY THOSE WHO HAVE MOCKED ME!
SO BE IT...YOU SHALL LEARN THE GREATEST SECRET OF ANCIENT EGYPT...A SECRET WHICH DIED BEFORE THE BIRTH OF YOUR CIVILIZATION...
TEACH ME... TEACH ME...
FOLD YOUR HANDS ACROSS YOUR CHEST!
YES...
NOW REPEAT AFTER ME..."BY THE SHADOW OF THE SPHINX, I CRAVE THE SECRET OF TUT AL EHMID!"
BY THE SHADOW OF THE SPHINX, I CRAVE THE SECRET OF TUT AL EHMID!
THE SPHINX FULFILLED ITS PROMISE! I LEARNED THE SECRET WHICH HAS BAFFLED MANKIND THRU-OUT THE AGES! IN ONE BLINDING FLASH, I REALIZED THAT I WOULD EXIST FOREVER--NEVER CHANGING...NEVER FADING!
IT IS DONE!
TOO LATE, I LEARNED THAT THE GREATEST FEAT OF ANCIENT EGYPT WAS THE SECRET OF PRESERVING... MUMMIES!
THE END

YOU'VE GOT YOUR DREAMS AND YOUR DESIRES, MR. HOPKINS··· BUT THEY'RE ALL WRAPPED UP IN *EVIL* ··· AND *DEATH!* THERE MUST BE AN AWAKENING ···

SORRY... MR. HOPKINS!

FOR EVERY MAN THERE'S A WOMAN, AND *TIMOTHY HOPKINS* FOUND THE ANSWER TO ALL HIS SECRET WISHES IN THIS CREATURE OF LOVELINESS! SHE WAS ALL HIS! ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS ··· *COMMIT MURDER, AND CHEAT!* BUT THE REWARD WAS WORTH IT ····

OR *WAS* IT ???

9958

FOR TIMOTHY HOPKINS, LIFE, UP TO A CERTAIN POINT, WAS A HUM-DRUM AFFAIR ··· A SHABBY BUSINESS OF A ROUTINE, SMALL-PAY JOB; A SHREWISH WIFE; A TOUGH, DEMANDING VOICE ··· BUT MR. HOPKINS WAS RESIGNED TO IT ··· AFTER ALL; WHAT COULD HE *DO* ABOUT IT ?

HURRY UP, HOPKINS! I NEED THAT REPORT IN A HURRY, MAN!

YES, SIR! YES, MY DEAR! YESSIR, DEAR ··· *OH DEAR!*

TIMOTHY! WILL YOU STOP SMOKING THAT FILTHY OLD PIPE IN MY NICE CLEAN LIVING ROOM ?

UP TO A CERTAIN POINT, THAT IS ··· AND THAT POINT WAS REACHED ON A SATURDAY AFTERNOON WHEN HE AND HIS WIFE VISITED A CARNIVAL THAT HAD COME TO TOWN ···

TIMOTHY, YOU *MUST* GO IN TO SEE THE OLD GYPSY! SHE'S SIMPLY MARVELOUS! SHE TOLD ME I'D GET A BIG SURPRISE VERY SOON! GO IN AND HAVE YOUR FORTUNE TOLD AT ONCE!

BUT I DON'T BELIEVE IN···

AT ONCE!

Y-YES, MY DEAR!

Girls!

Gypsy

POOR MR. HOPKINS! JUST A PIECE OF DRIFTWOOD ON THE SEA OF LIFE! NO MIND OF HIS OWN... NO WILL! SO HE OBEYED THE COMMAND OF HIS WIFE, AND ENTERED THE DARKENED TENT...

CAN'T... SEE... A THING... IN HERE! DARK! MARTHA, I DON'T WANT TO...

GO ON, TIMOTHY!

JUST A HARD-LUCK KID, THAT'S ALL HE WAS! EVERYTHING BAD HAPPENED TO MR. HOPKINS... LIKE BUMPING INTO THE TENT-POLE, AND DROPPING HIS GLASSES!

OH, DEAR! MY GLASSES! I'LL NEVER FIND THEM IN THIS DARK!

WELL, HE WASN'T *ALL* UNLUCKY... SOMEONE WAS THERE TO HELP HIM! A HAND PLACED THE GLASSES IN HIS---

HERE YOU ARE, MR. HOPKINS!

OH... THANK YOU!

AND WHEN HE PUT THEM ON, THE INTERIOR OF THE TENT LIT UP... AND THERE BEFORE HIM WAS A VISION OF LOVELINESS!

THERE! CAN YOU SEE ALL RIGHT NOW?

OH... YES... OH, MY GOODNESS! YOU... YOU'RE *BEAUTIFUL!* BUT... BUT THE PICTURE OUTSIDE... YOU'RE NOT THE FORTUNE-TELLER...?

NEVER... NEVER IN ALL HIS LIFE HAD MR. HOPKINS SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS -- OR FELT AS HE DID NOW! TO SAY THAT HIS SENSES WERE SPINNING WOULD BE PUTTING IT MILDLY!!!

OH... THAT! PAY NO ATTENTION TO IT, MR. HOPKINS! TELL ME... DO YOU LIKE ME?

LIKE YOU??? WHY, YOU'RE LOVELY... WONDERFUL! BUT WHAT AM I SAYING??? MY WIFE... SHE'S RIGHT OUTSIDE!

YOUR WIFE... AH, YES! YOU HATE HER, DON'T YOU, MISTER HOPKINS? YOU *DO*... *DON'T YOU!?!?*

WHY DON'T YOU KILL HER, MR. HOPKINS?

K-K-KILL HER!?!?

CERTAINLY! KILL HER... THEN BRING ME A LOT OF MONEY! YOU CAN ROB YOUR BOSS... YOU KNOW WHERE HE KEEPS HIS MONEY, DON'T YOU? GET RID OF YOUR WIFE... KILL HER... GET THE MONEY... AND COME BACK TO ME! I'LL BE WAITING...

YES! YES! I'LL DO IT! I'LL DO ANYTHING FOR YOU... BUT FIRST, A KISS! *I MUST HAVE A KISS!!!*

NO... NOT YET! WHEN YOU COME BACK, MY DEAR! WHEN YOU TELL ME THE JOB IS DONE! I... I... I LOVE YOU, MR. HOPKINS!

LOVE ME...? OH, MY GOODNESS! I'LL DO IT... I'LL KILL HER! I'LL BE BACK VERY SOON! GOODBYE... OH, GOODBYE, MY BELOVED!

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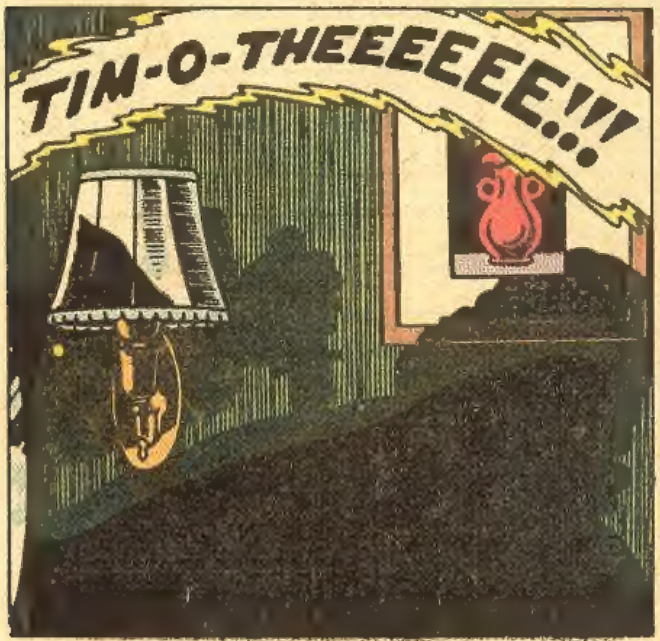
AND THAT'S HOW IT STARTED ··· THIS MEEK LITTLE MAN WHO HAD NEVER DARED ENTERTAIN THOUGHTS OF MURDER AND ROBBERY, WAS NOW CAUGHT IN A WHIRLPOOL OF EVIL AND INSANE DESIRE!!!
WHAT DID SHE TELL YOU, TIMOTHY? WASN'T SHE A FUNNY-LOOKING OLD THING?
ER ··· NOT MUCH, MY DEAR!
FUNNY-LOOKING? OH, BROTHER! BRO-THER!!!
GYPSY
FORTUNE TELLER

THAT NIGHT, HIS MIND STILL FILLED WITH VISIONS OF THE LOVELY GYPSY GIRL, MR. HOPKINS SET ABOUT THE FIRST STEP IN HIS PLAN ···
NOW, DON'T JUST STAND THERE STARING AT ME, TIMOTHY ··· GO TO BED! I'VE GOT TO PUT ON MY FACIAL CREAM, AND··· TIMOTHY! WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT???


TIM-O-THEEEEEE!!!

SO NOW THERE WAS BLOOD ON HIS HANDS, BUT MR. HOPKINS DIDN'T CARE! THE GYPSY GIRL WOULD KISS THEM CLEAN! IT WAS TIME NOW FOR THE SECOND STEP ··· THE ROBBERY OF HIS EMPLOYER ···
HE DOESN'T PAY ME MUCH ··· BUT HE GIVES ME A KEY TO THE OFFICE IN CASE I WORK LATE! AHHH! THAT'S ALL OVER NOW! WE'LL RUN AWAY TOGETHER, ME AND··· AND··· WHY, COME TO THINK OF IT, I DON'T EVEN KNOW HER NAME! BUT NO MATTER···

···DOESN'T TRUST BANKS, THE OLD FOOL! KEEPS ALL HIS MONEY -- HIS LIFE'S SAVINGS -- IN HIS DESK! DOESN'T THINK I KNOW IT ··· HEH! THERE, NOW··· IT'S ALL MINE ··· MINE AND HERS!!!
$500

TWO CRIMES ··· MURDER AND ROBBERY! AT LAST THE MEEK MR. HOPKINS WAS A PERSON OF IMPORTANCE! AT LAST HE HAD DONE SOMETHING B/G! AND NOW HE RUSHED TO COLLECT HIS REWARD ··· THE CARNIVAL GROUNDS WERE DARK AND DESERTED···
BUT SHE'S STILL HERE! I KNOW IT··· I FEEL IT IN MY BONES! I'VE DONE WHAT SHE ASKED, AND NOW··· NOW···
FAT LADY
HORROR OF HORROR THE

POOR MR HOPKINS! HE WAS IN SUCH A HURRY FOR A KISS FROM THOSE RUBY LIPS, HE RUSHED INTO THE TENT AND AGAIN RAN INTO THE POLE!
DARLING ... !
OOOHHH! MY GLASSES!
HERE THEY ARE, MR. HOPKINS · DID YOU DO AS I ASKED?
EVERYTHING! EVERYTHING! MY WIFE IS DEAD AND HERE'S THE MONEY -- BUT I CAN'T SEE A THING WITHOUT MY GLASSES!
I ... I · I'M SO ANXIOUS FOR THAT KISS! AND ... AND WE WILL GO AWAY TOGETHER, WON'T WE? WON'T WE?
ANYTHING YOU SAY, MY DARLING! BUT · YOU'RE FORGETTING TO PUT ON YOUR GLASSES!
OH YES OF COURSE! HMMM ... THESE FEEL JUST LIKE MY OLD ONES
THEY ARE YOUR OLD ONES, SWEETHEART! WHEN YOU BROKE THEM, I GAVE YOU A PAIR THAT I KEEP AROUND JUST FOR TIMES LIKE THIS! I HAD YOURS REPAIRED NOW, KISS ME!
OH NO! AAAIEEEEE!!!
KISS ME! KISS ME!
SORRY, MR. HOPKINS!
THE END
4

STAN LEE PRESENTS: JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY™

THE OLD KEYSTONE MANOR... STEEPED IN SINISTER TRADITION AND SHROUDED BY A HISTORY OF — *VIOLENCE!* FOR THE VENGEFUL GUARDIAN OF THE FOREBODING MANSION WOULD STOP AT NOTHING TO PROTECT HIS SECRET! NOT EVEN — *MURDER!*

HOUSE FOR SALE

THE REAL ESTATE OFFICE OF RICHARD BURNS WAS ASTIR! IN UNEASY WHISPERS, EMPLOYEES PASSED THE WORD OF A FORTHCOMING BUDGET CUT!

HEY, CHARLIE — READ ABOUT THE NEW ECONOMY MOVE? SOMEONE'S GOING TO BE *FIRED!*

SHHH — NOT SO LOUD! HERE COMES OLD HARRIS!

GOOD MORNING, MISS DEE!

GOSH, HOPE HE DIDN'T HEAR ME! POOR OLD GUY — HASN'T MADE A COMMISSION ON A HOUSE IN MONTHS!

BUT HE ALWAYS LOOKS LIKE HE OWNED THE WORLD! UMBRELLA, SPATS, GLOVES — A REAL *GENTLEMAN!* I FEEL SORRY FOR HIM!

ORIGINALLY PRESENTED IN MYSTIC #9

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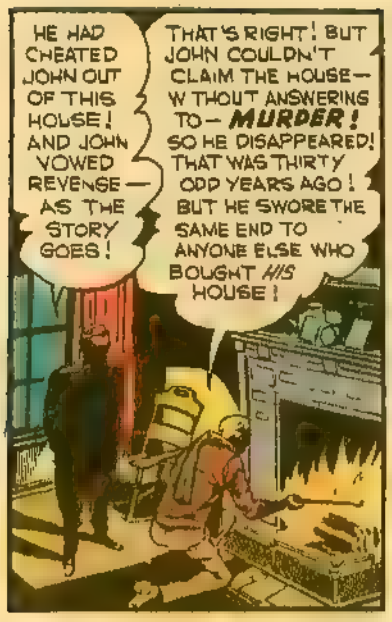
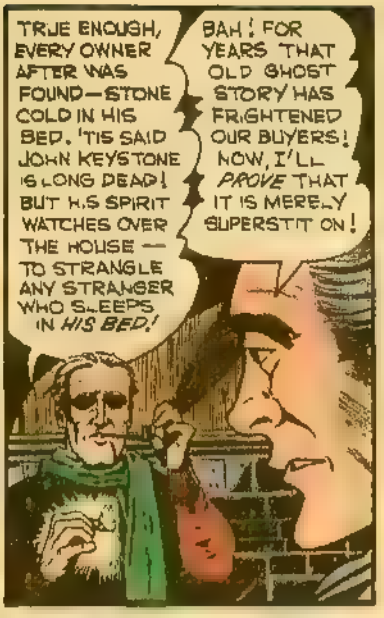
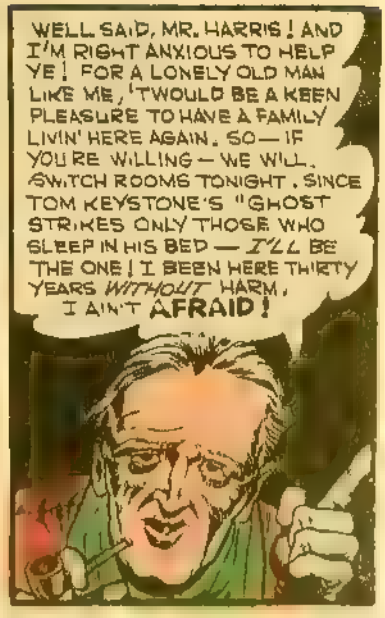
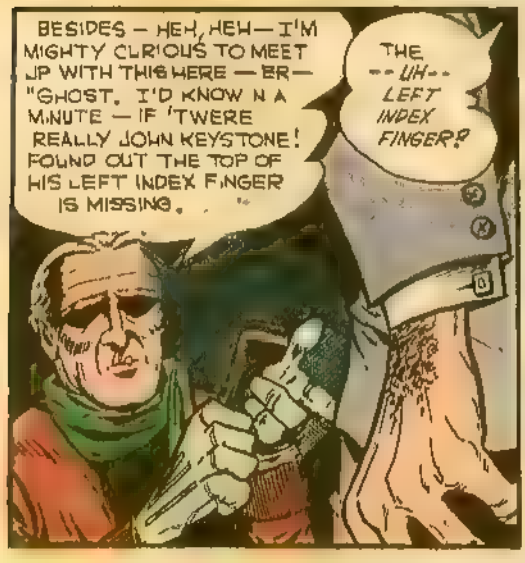
OF ALL EMPLOYEES, OLD PAUL HARRIS WAS MOST LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED! IT WAS HIS MEAGER SALES RECORD THAT PROMPTED DESPERATE ACTION TO SAVE HIS JOB!
THE KEYSTONE MANOR?! GOOD HEAVENS, MAN— YOU KNOW ITS REPUTATION! WH-WHY, THAT'S PRACTICALLY SUICIDE, HARRIS!
I KNOW WE HAVE A PROSPECTIVE BUYER — BEN WHITE IS INTERESTED IN IT!
BY STAYING THERE ONE NIGHT, PERHAPS IT WILL CONVINCE HIM TO BUY IT! IF I COME OUT UNHARMED, IT WILL PROVE THE STORY OF A MURDEROUS-ER— "SPIRIT" IS FALSE! I'D LIKE TO TRY, MR. BURNS!
WELL, HARRIS-IF YOU ABSOLUTELY INSIST—! IT'S TRUE THE HOUSE HAS BEEN A LIABILITY FOR YEARS! AND WHITE MAY BE OUR LAST CHANCE!
THAT NIGHT, THE ELEMENTS SEEMED TO DETER HARRIS'S MISSION! SHEETS OF ICY RAIN HISSED SINISTER WARNINGS! THE WIND WAILED MOURNFULLY— AS HE APPROACHED THE FOREBODING MANSION!
MR. HARRIS? YES, YES— COME IN!
THANK YOU!
'TAIN'T FIT FER A HUMAN BODY OUT THERE TONIGHT! COME INTO THE PARLOR, MR. HARRIS! I'M JUST CLEANING THE FIREPLACE! HAVE A NICE, COZY BLAZE GOING IN NO TIME!
THERE NOW! GOOD TO GET THOSE WET CLOTHES OFF!
MR. BURNS TELEPHONED ME! SAID YOU'D BE STAYING THE NIGHT! I'M JEB TREBLE — THE CARETAKER!
AH, YES! A COMFORT INDEED, TO HAVE SOMEONE ELSE IN THIS HOUSE, MR. TREBLE!
LOUDER, FURIOUSLY, THE STORM RAGED OUTSIDE! ANGRY ROARS OF THUNDER SHOOK THE HOUSE! AND LIGHTNING LIT THE OLD CARETAKER'S FACE GARISHLY!
YOU'RE A BRAVE MAN, TO STAY HERE, MR. HARRIS! HEH, HEH — ESPECIALLY TONIGHT! THE OLD PLACE CREAKS WITH A THOUSAND TERRIBLE SECRETS! AND THE WINDS HOWL ENOUGH TO FRIGHTEN THE DEAD! HEH ..HEH.. HEH!
B-BUT YOU DON'T SEEM TO MIND IT, JEB?
BEEN HERE A LONG TIME! THIRTY YEARS, IN FACT—! RIGHT AFTER OLD TOM KEYSTONE WAS FOUND STRANGLED IN HIS BED! KILLED BY HIS OWN BROTHER JOHN!

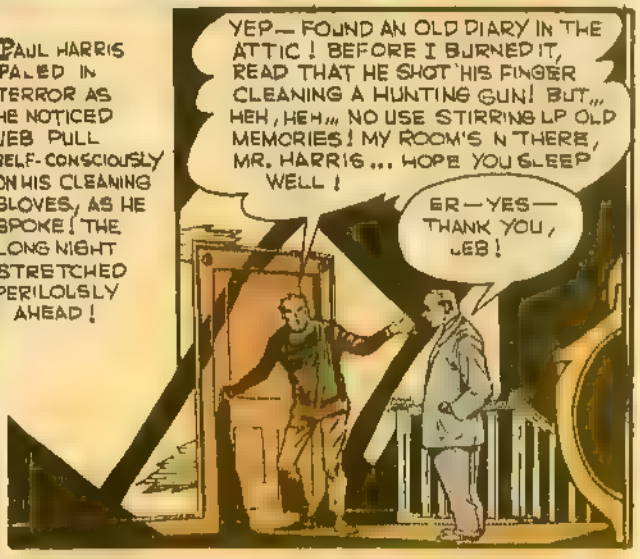

HE HAD CHEATED JOHN OUT OF THIS HOUSE! AND JOHN VOWED REVENGE — AS THE STORY GOES!
THAT'S RIGHT! BUT JOHN COULDN'T CLAIM THE HOUSE — W'THOUT ANSWERING TO — MURDER! SO HE DISAPPEARED! THAT WAS THIRTY ODD YEARS AGO! BUT HE SWORE THE SAME END TO ANYONE ELSE WHO BOUGHT HIS HOUSE!

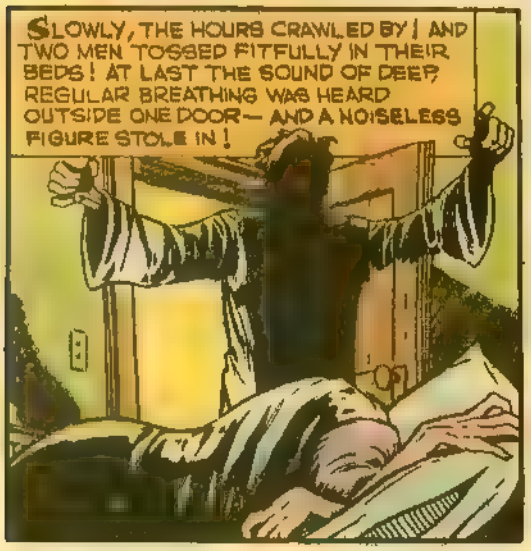

TRUE ENOUGH, EVERY OWNER AFTER WAS FOUND — STONE COLD IN HIS BED. 'TIS SAID JOHN KEYSTONE IS LONG DEAD! BUT HIS SPIRIT WATCHES OVER THE HOUSE — TO STRANGLE ANY STRANGER WHO SLEEPS IN HIS BED!
BAH! FOR YEARS THAT OLD GHOST STORY HAS FRIGHTENED OUR BUYERS! NOW, I'LL PROVE THAT IT IS MERELY SUPERSTITION!

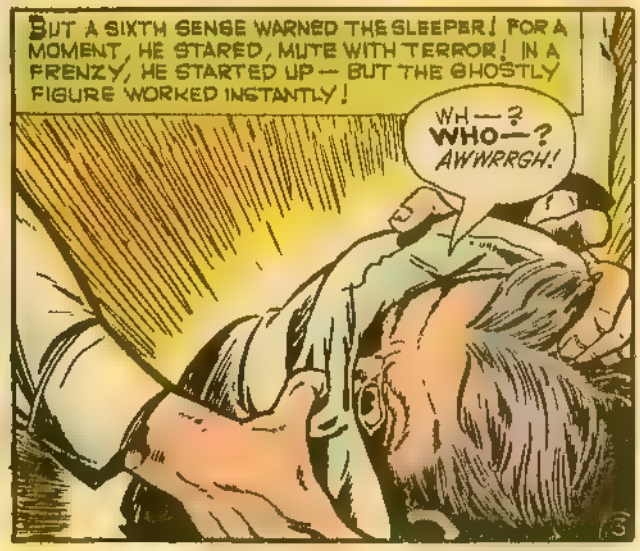

WELL SAID, MR. HARRIS! AND I'M RIGHT ANXIOUS TO HELP YE! FOR A LONELY OLD MAN LIKE ME, 'TWOULD BE A KEEN PLEASURE TO HAVE A FAMILY LIVIN' HERE AGAIN. SO — IF YOU'RE WILLING — WE WILL. SWITCH ROOMS TONIGHT. SINCE TOM KEYSTONE'S "GHOST STRIKES ONLY THOSE WHO SLEEP IN HIS BED — I'LL BE THE ONE! I BEEN HERE THIRTY YEARS WITHOUT HARM, I AIN'T AFRAID!


BESIDES — HEH, HEH — I'M MIGHTY CURIOUS TO MEET UP WITH THIS HERE — ER — "GHOST. I'D KNOW IN A MINUTE — IF 'TWERE REALLY JOHN KEYSTONE! FOUND OUT THE TOP OF HIS LEFT INDEX FINGER IS MISSING.
THE, --UH-- LEFT INDEX FINGER?

PAUL HARRIS PALED IN TERROR AS HE NOTICED JEB PULL SELF-CONSCIOUSLY ON HIS CLEANING GLOVES, AS HE SPOKE! THE LONG NIGHT STRETCHED PERILOUSLY AHEAD!


YEP — FOUND AN OLD DIARY IN THE ATTIC! BEFORE I BURNED IT, READ THAT HE SHOT HIS FINGER CLEANING A HUNTING GUN! BUT,,, HEH, HEH,,, NO USE STIRRING UP OLD MEMORIES! MY ROOM'S N'THERE, MR. HARRIS... HOPE YOU SLEEP WELL!
ER — YES — THANK YOU, JEB!

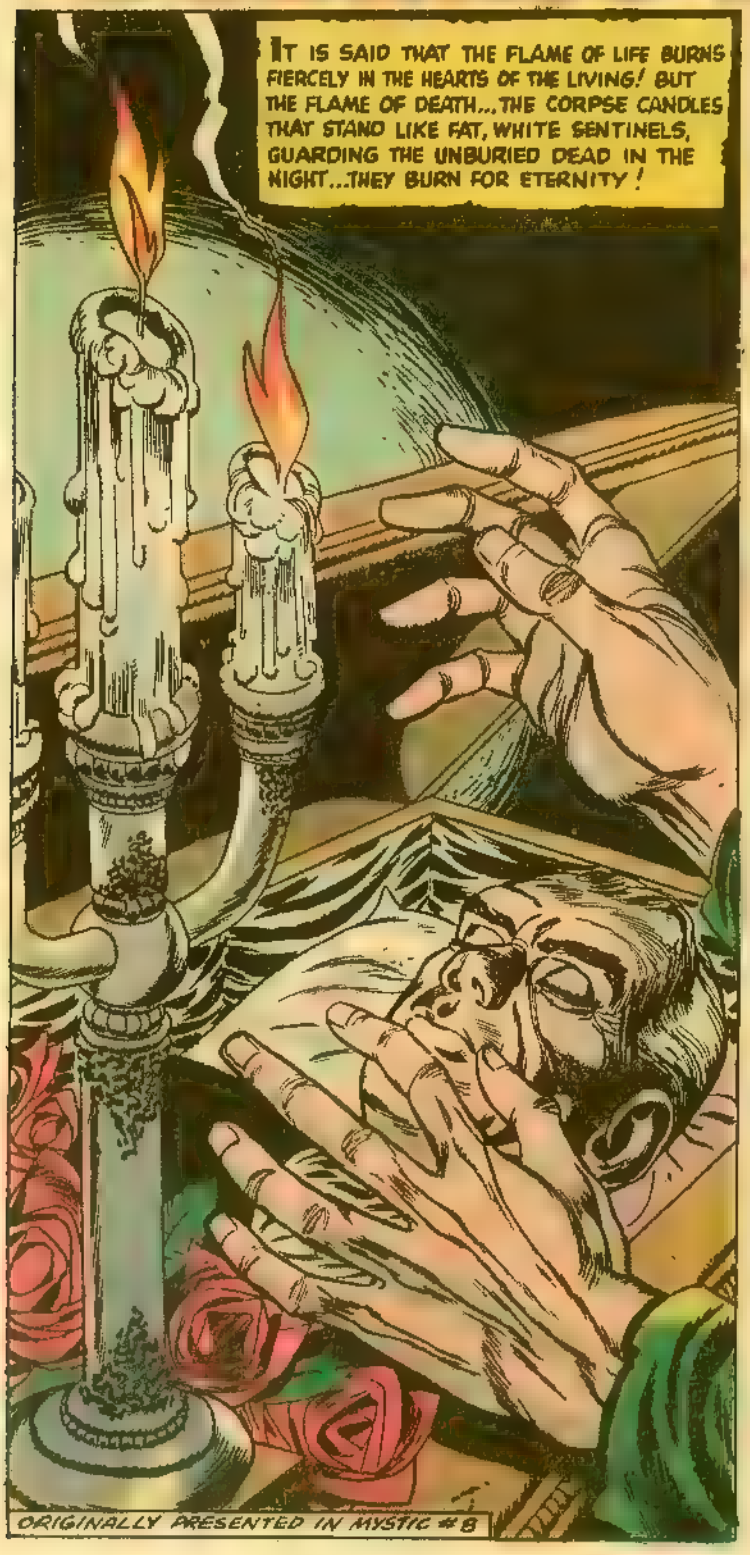

SLOWLY, THE HOURS CRAWLED BY! AND TWO MEN TOSSED FITFULLY IN THEIR BEDS! AT LAST THE SOUND OF DEEP, REGULAR BREATHING WAS HEARD OUTSIDE ONE DOOR — AND A NOISELESS FIGURE STOLE IN!


BUT A SIXTH SENSE WARNED THE SLEEPER! FOR A MOMENT, HE STARED, MUTE WITH TERROR! IN A FRENZY, HE STARTED UP — BUT THE GHOSTLY FIGURE WORKED INSTANTLY!
WH — ? WHO — ? AWWRGH!

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

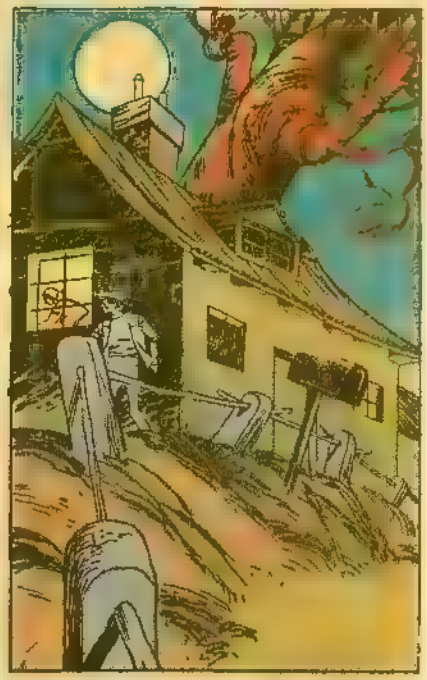
THE NEXT MORNING...
KNOCK! KNOCK!
I--I'D BETTER CALL THE POLICE !!!
PAUL HARRIS DASHED TO THE TELEPHONE! WITHIN MINUTES AFTER HIS GRISLY DISCOVERY...
-AND THAT'S THE STORY, INSPECTOR! I PHONED YOU IMMEDIATELY!
QUITE A NARROW ESCAPE, HARRIS!
HMMM— STRANGLED, ALL RIGHT! BUT NOT A FINGERPRINT ANYWHERE!
JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHERS! NOT A CLUE, NOT A TRACE! IT'S NOT HUMAN! JUST PLAIN— NOT HUMAN!
I'M SORRY, MR. BURNS! MY PLAN FAILED: AND IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR POOR JEB— I-ER—NOT A PLEASANT THOUGHT—!
FORGET IT, HARRIS! SEEMS LIKE THAT OLD GHOST STORY IS TRUE, AFTER ALL!
AND WITH THIS BAD PUBLICITY, WE'LL NEVER SELL THE HOUSE! BUT YOUR DEVOTION TO THE FIRM DESERVES A REWARD! IN SPITE OF OUR BUDGET, HARRIS, THERE'LL ALWAYS BE A JOB FOR YOU WITH BURNS BROTHERS!
OH, THANK YOU, SIR! THANK YOU!
WELL (SIGH!) THAT'S IT! WE MAY NEED YOU LATER AT HEADQUARTERS!
CERTAINLY, INSPECTOR! SHALL I WAIT, HARRIS?
I'LL BE AT THE OFFICE IN A FEW MINUTES, MR. BURNS! JUST WANT TO DRESS AND PACK MY NIGHTCLOTHES!
SOON AFTER...
WITH JEB GONE, MY SECRET IS SAFE FOREVER! NOW THEY'LL NEVER SELL MY HOUSE— NEVER! YES, HA, HA! I'VE MADE SURE! NO ONE WILL LIVE HERE! HA, HA— IT WILL ALWAYS BE MINE! MINE!
YOU SHOULD'VE WAITED UNTIL THE INSPECTOR WAS OUT OF EARSHOT, HARRIS. HE HEARD YOU!
THE END
4

THE BURNING FLAME


IT IS SAID THAT THE FLAME OF LIFE BURNS FIERCELY IN THE HEARTS OF THE LIVING! BUT THE FLAME OF DEATH...THE CORPSE CANDLES THAT STAND LIKE FAT, WHITE SENTINELS, GUARDING THE UNBURIED DEAD IN THE NIGHT...THEY BURN FOR ETERNITY!

ORIGINALLY PRESENTED IN MYSTIC #8

A BUM, A VICIOUS MAN, DEGRADED AND WITHOUT CONSCIENCE, PEERED FROM THE NIGHT'S DARKNESS THRU THE LIGHTED WINDOW OF A SMALL HOME!



SHE'S ALONE! A QUICK TWIST OF MY FINGERS AROUND HER NECK AND SHE'D BE QUIET! THERE MUST BE SOME MONEY IN THERE...OR SOMETHING VALUABLE ENOUGH TO PAWN AN' GET A FEW BUCKS FOR!

A MAN ENTERED THE ROOM OF THE SMALL HOME...

THE BUM CURSED AND BACKED AWAY...SNARLING LIKE A LICKED CUR HE FADED INTO THE NIGHT...

A FEW MINUTES LATER, THE BUM STOOD AT THE GATE OF ANOTHER HOUSE, HIS EYES LIKE WALTZING MICE, DARTING FROM SIDE TO SIDE...

LOOKS LIKE NOBODY'S HOME! THAT'S GOOD! IT'LL GIVE ME TIME TO SWIPE SOMETHIN' VALUABLE!

THE GATE SQUEALED IN PROTEST AS HE EASED IT OPEN, AND THE SOUND WAS HEARD BY THE GUARDIAN OF THE HUMBLE HOME

GRRR!

THE BUM SLAMMED THE GATE SHUT IN THE SNARLING FACE OF THE ONRUSHING DOG..

LOUSY MUTT! G'WAN ..!

SLAM

ONCE AGAIN THE BUM FADED INTO THE DARK! LIKE A RAT HE KEPT TO THE DEEP SHADOWS AS HE SNEAKED THRU THE STREETS OF THE LITTLE TOWN..

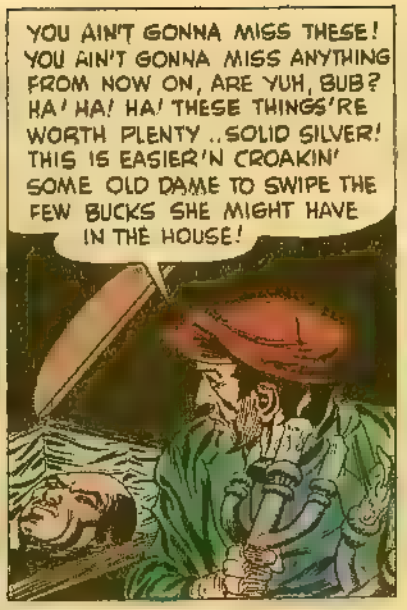
FUNERAL PARLOR

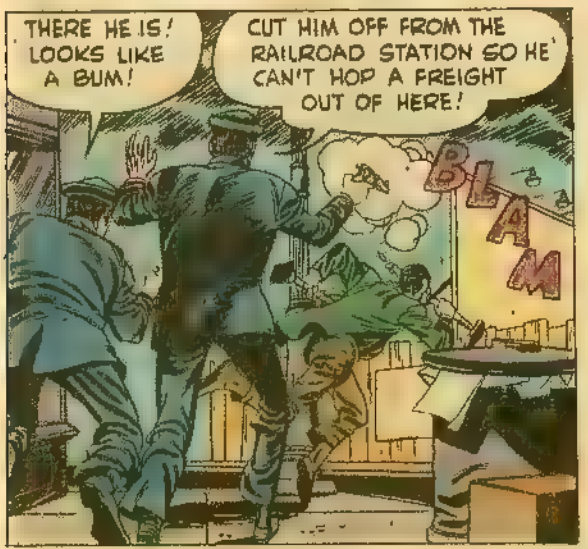
A STIFF! HEY, THOSE CANDLEHOLDERS WOULD BRING PLENTY IN A HOCK SHOP! DON'T LOOK LIKE THERE'S ANYBODY IN HERE BUT THAT CORPSE!

HUH, THIS LOCK'S A CINCH!

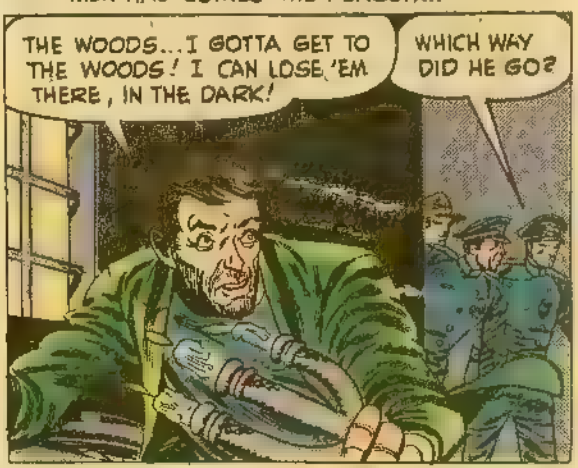
2

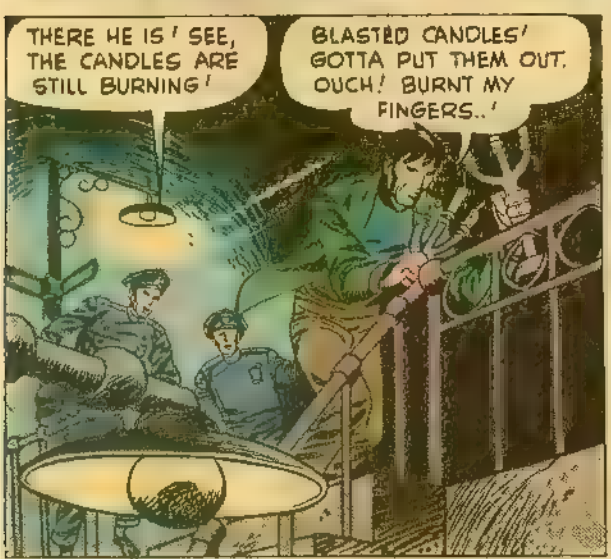
THE SECRET EMPIRE IS BACK! AND THIS T ME NOT EVEN CAPTAIN AMERICA CAN STOP THEM!


YOU AIN'T GONNA MISS THESE! YOU AIN'T GONNA MISS ANYTHING FROM NOW ON, ARE YUH, BUB? HA! HA! HA! THESE THINGS'RE WORTH PLENTY ..SOLID SILVER! THIS IS EASIER'N CROAKIN' SOME OLD DAME TO SWIPE THE FEW BUCKS SHE MIGHT HAVE IN THE HOUSE!



THE BUM RUSHED THRU THE DARKNESS, CLUTCHING THE FLAMING CANDLESTICKS! BEHIND HIM MORE MEN HAD JOINED THE PURSUIT...





THE CORPSE CANDLES BURNED! THEY SPUTTERED AND SMOKED, BUT WENT ON FLAMING! THE BUM PINCHED AT THE WICKS. . HIS FLESH SCORCHED, BUT THE CANDLES COULDN'T BE SNUFFED OUT..

I CAN'T PUT THEM OUT! THERE'S THE WOODS! SOON'S I GET IN THE WOODS I'LL PULL THE CANDLES OUT OF THE STICKS!

HE REACHED THE EERIE DARKNESS OF THE WOODS AND PAUSED FOR BREATH, AND TO SMOTHER THE LIGHT OF THE CANDLES...

CAN'T GET 'EM LOOSE! THE MELTED WAX MUST BE HOLDIN' 'EM FAST!

HE HEARD THE PURSUIT BEHIND HIM! HE BECAME FRANTIC!

GO OUT... GO OUT! BLAST YUH, STOP BURNING!

GOTTA GET TO WHERE IT'S DARK! GOTTA FIND A PLACE TO HIDE!

THERE'S THE LIGHTS!

I SEE HIM..! GOT HIM!

BAM

HE STAGGERED ON, CLUTCHING THE CANDLESTICKS, AND THE LIGHT FROM THE CANDLES WAS LIKE DANCING FIREFLIES, GUIDING THE MEN BEHIND HIM! BUT THE LIGHT THREW A SHADOW THAT MASKED A DEEP HOLE, AND...

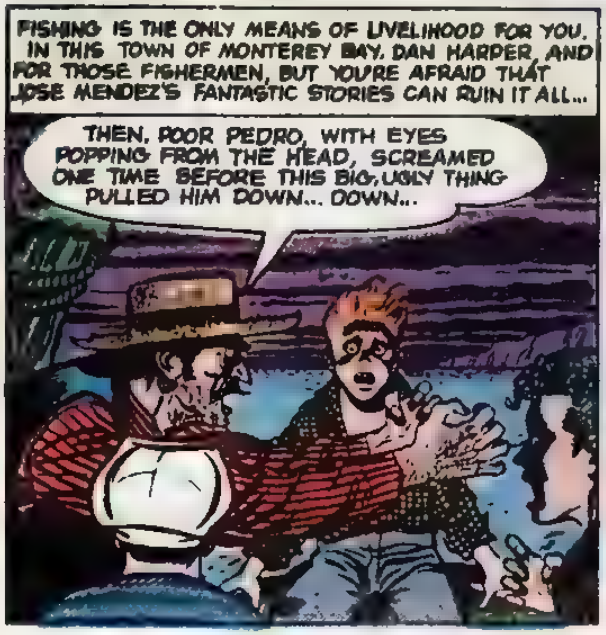
ARRRR

THERE WAS A DULL CRACK! THE BUM LAY IN THE HOLE, HIS NECK BROKEN, HIS DEAD EYES PEERING UPWARD TOWARD THE BRIGHT SKY...

GOOD HEAVENS, THIS IS FANTASTIC! THOSE CANDLES ARE STILL BURNING... AND THAT BUM IS DEAD STUMBLED RIGHT INTO THE GRAVE OF THE CORPSE HE STOLE THE CANDLES FROM!

THE END

A MONSTER AMONG US
HELP! HE'S DRAGGIN' ME INTO THE SEA! HELP ME... HELP ME! ARGGG!
IT'S THE MONSTER OF MONTEREY! NOTHING CAN HELP POOR PEDRO NOW! I MUST GET BACK AND WARN THE VILLAGE... I MUST!
ORIGINALLY PRESENTED IN MYSTIC #8


FISHING IS THE ONLY MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD FOR YOU, IN THIS TOWN OF MONTEREY BAY. DAN HARPER, AND FOR THOSE FISHERMEN, BUT YOU'RE AFRAID THAT JOSE MENDEZ'S FANTASTIC STORIES CAN RUIN IT ALL...
THEN, POOR PEDRO, WITH EYES POPPING FROM THE HEAD, SCREAMED ONE TIME BEFORE THIS BIG, UGLY THING PULLED HIM DOWN... DOWN...

THE LONG, HAIRY ARMS SUCKING AT HIS THROAT, THE FACE, TOO UGLY TO TELL ABOUT, CLOSE TO HIS...
THAT BLASTED FOOL! I'VE STOOD ABOUT ALL OF THIS I CAN!

JOSE! SHUT UP! YOUR BLASTED FAIRY TALES WILL FRIGHTEN ALL THE MEN FROM GOING OUT FOR FISH!
B..BUT, SENOR! THIS IS NO MAKE-BELIEVE STORY! EVERY FISHERMAN KNOWS IT IS TRUE ABOUT THE MONSTER OF MONTEREY! WHEN I WAS A LITTLE BOY, MY GRANDFATHER... HE TOLD ME!
MY GRANDFATHER, HE SAYS IT CAN COME ON LAND. LOOK LIKE SOME OTHER ANIMAL... A HORSE, A GOAT! EVEN NOW, SENOR, THERE MAY BE A MONSTER AMONG US!
THE ONLY MONSTER AMONG US IS YOU, JOSE! YOU'RE A STUPID APE!
INSTEAD OF WASTING YOUR TIME TELLING STORIES.. GET OUT THERE AND BRING IN SOME FISH, YOU LAZY FOOL! NOW GET!
BUT I HAVE JUST RETURNED, SENOR HARPER!
YOU FORCE HIM TO GO! YOU KNOW YOU'VE SCARED JOSE ENOUGH TO KEEP HIM FROM EVER MENTIONING MONSTERS AGAIN! YOU WATCH HIM PUT OUT TO SEA, BUT TWO HOURS LATER, YOU HEAR FRIGHTENED VOICES FROM THE SHORE...
I SAW IT! GREAT HAIRY ARMS! IT TRIED TO GRAB ME...
CARAMBA! THE MONSTER!
ARE YOU SURE, JOSE? MAYBE IT WAS... HOW YOU CALL... OCTOPUS?
NO! NO OCTOPUS! THAT I HAVE SEEN! IT MAKES ME COLD JUST TO THINK! TOO HORRIBLE TO LOOK AT! DEATH IS BETTER THAN TO SEE IT!
I WARNED YOU, JOSE! MAYBE THIS WILL KEEP YOUR BIG MOUTH SHUT!
BUT IT'S TRUE.. IT'S... OWW!
NOW, GET OUT OF HERE, MENDEZ! YOU'RE THROUGH FISHING FOR ME! IF I EVER SEE YOU AROUND AGAIN I'LL...
OHH! TH...THERE! IT'S COMING... THE MONSTER!

WHERE? YOU MEAN THAT POOCH? HA, HA, HA! YOU HEAR THAT, MEN? JOSE'S MONSTER IS JUST A POOR LITTLE MUTT! HE'S LOCO! HA, HA, HA!
I TELL YOU THIS MONSTER CAN LOOK LIKE ANYTHING... EVEN A DOG!
JOSE IS GONE, BUT THE DAMAGE HAS BEEN DONE... YOU SEE IT IN THE SERIOUS FACES OF THE FISHERMEN!
OH, NOW WAIT A MINUTE... YOU MEN DON'T BELIEVE IN MONSTERS AND HOBGOBLINS? YOU, SANTO, YOU'RE AN INTELLIGENT MAN!
THE SEA, SENOR, SHE HIDES MANY TERRIBLE THINGS! I WOULD NOT DARE TO TEMPT HER! YES, I AM AFRAID!
BLAST YOU! I'M NOT! I'LL TEMPT THE SEA TO SHOW ME HER WORST! I'LL PROVE THE MONSTER IS JUST SOMETHING OUT OF JOSE'S TWISTED BRAIN!
WAIT, SENOR HARPER! PLEASE DO NOT GO OUT THERE! YOU SEE THE CLOUDS! SHE HEARD YOU AND IS ANGRY! IT IS AN EVIL OMEN...
BUT YOU FEAR NOTHING, NOT ANY MAN OR THE SEA, OR ANY FRIGHTFUL CREATURES IN HER MURKY DEPTHS! LET THE STORM RAGE... YOU'LL SHOW THESE IGNORANT FOOLS...
COME ON, OLD LADY! DO YOUR DARNDEST! BRING ON YOUR HAIRY-ARMED GIANT! HA, HA, HA!
HA! HA! HA!
YOU'RE OUT ALMOST AN HOUR NOW... DEFYING THE UNKNOWN! WHAT IN THE SEA BELOW COULD BE WORSE THAN THIS STORM?
HOWL AWAY! SMASH AT ME! I'M NOT AFRAID OF... EEYOWW!
CRASH!
3

YOUR BOAT IS SMASHED ON THE LOOMING REEFS! BUT YOU'RE ALIVE! YOU CLIMB... YOUR HANDS ARE TORN AND BLOODY, BUT YOU'RE SAFE! YOU'VE WON...
A LIGHTHOUSE! I... I'VE BEATEN THE SEA!

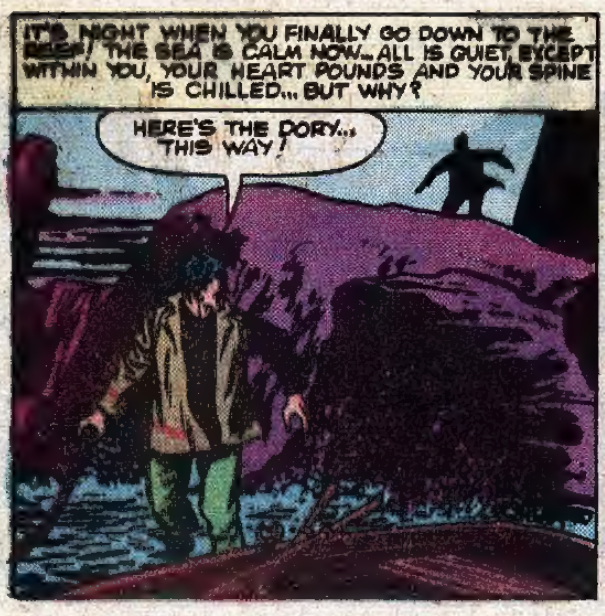
HELLO! HELLO! UP THERE!

THE SCREAMING WIND DROWNS YOUR CRIES SO YOU CLIMB THE ENDLESS STAIRS UNTIL YOU COME TO THE DOOR...
HELLO! I CRACKED UP ON YOUR ROCKS DOWN THERE! (PHEW!) WHAT PLACE IS THIS?
DRUMMOND REEF LIGHTHOUSE... COME IN! COME RIGHT IN! OH, YOU'RE SOAKED TO THE SKIN!

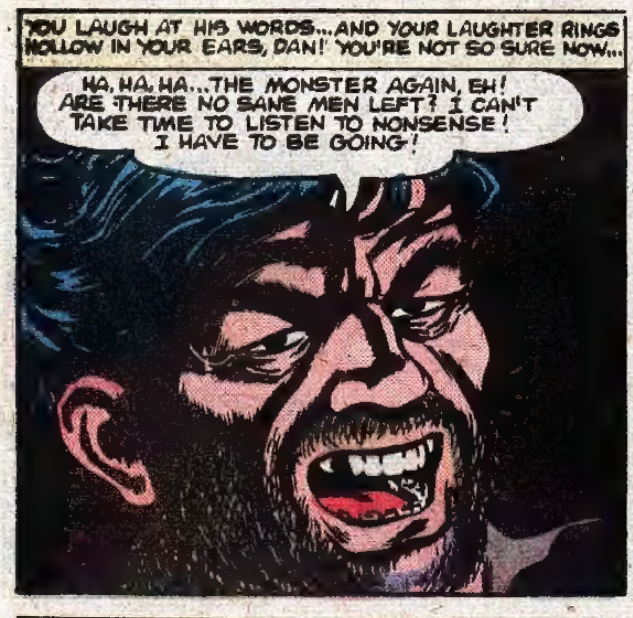
YOU MUST'VE BEEN PLENTY FAR OUT TO SEA TO LET YOURSELF GET CAUGHT IN THIS STORM! GET THOSE WET THINGS OFF... I'LL DRY 'EM OVER THE STOVE WHILE YOU EAT!
YOU'RE READING MY MIND, FRIEND... I'M STARVED! ABOUT BEING OUT HERE... I CAME FROM SHORE, LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT IT!

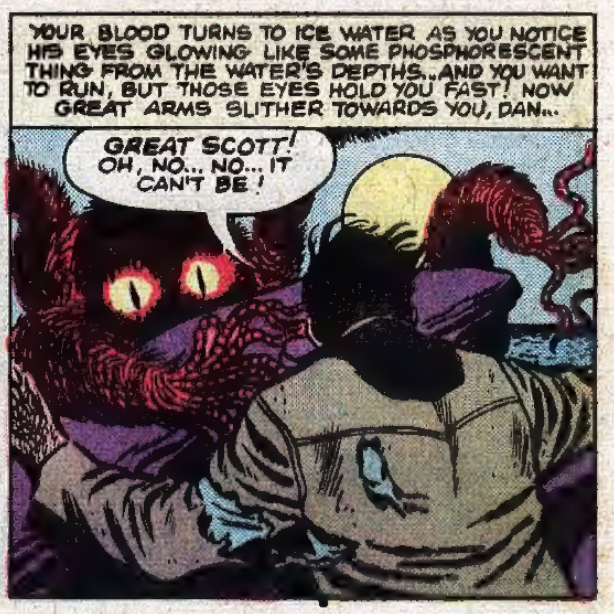
SOMETHING KEEPS NAGGING AT YOUR BRAIN AS YOU TELL THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER HOW AND WHY YOU DEFIED THE SEA... AND SUDDENLY IT DAWNS ON YOU...
NOW I'M ANXIOUS TO GET BACK AND SHOW THOSE WITLESS FOOLS THAT THEIR MONSTER IS BUT A... HOLD ON! THIS LIGHTHOUSE! IT WAS PUT OUT OF SERVICE TEN YEARS AGO!
SO IT WAS...

BUT HOW LUCKY FOR YOU IT IS BACK IN SERVICE TODAY, EH? AH, THE STORM IS LETTING UP! I HAVE A DORY YOU MAY BORROW...


IT'S NIGHT WHEN YOU FINALLY GO DOWN TO THE BEEP! THE SEA IS CALM NOW... ALL IS QUIET, EXCEPT WITHIN YOU, YOUR HEART POUNDS AND YOUR SPINE IS CHILLED... BUT WHY?
HERE'S THE DORY... THIS WAY!

SEE HERE, MISTER! IF THIS LIGHTHOUSE WAS PUT BACK IN SERVICE TODAY, WHY ISN'T THAT LIGHT GOING AS IT SHOULD AT NIGHT? I DON'T BELIEVE YOU'RE A LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER!
YOU DOUBT EVERYTHING DON'T YOU, DAN HARPER? THE MYSTIC POWER OF THE SEA... HER GREAT CHILDREN FROM THE DEER...


YOU LAUGH AT HIS WORDS... AND YOUR LAUGHTER RINGS HOLLOW IN YOUR EARS, DAN! YOU'RE NOT SO SURE NOW...
HA, HA, HA... THE MONSTER AGAIN, EH! ARE THERE NO SANE MEN LEFT? I CAN'T TAKE TIME TO LISTEN TO NONSENSE! I HAVE TO BE GOING!


YOUR BLOOD TURNS TO ICE WATER AS YOU NOTICE HIS EYES GLOWING LIKE SOME PHOSPHORESCENT THING FROM THE WATER'S DEPTHS... AND YOU WANT TO RUN, BUT THOSE EYES HOLD YOU FAST! NOW GREAT ARMS SLITHER TOWARDS YOU, DAN...
GREAT SCOTT! OH, NO... NO... IT CAN'T BE!

JOSE'S IDIOTICALLY BABBLED WORDS CAME TO YOU IN A JUMBLE... THIS MONSTER CAN LOOK LIKE ANYTHING... EVEN A DOG... OR A LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER!
AAAIIIIII!
5

ITS FACE... TOO HORRIBLE TO LOOK AT, JOSE SAID... DEATH IS BETTER THAN TO SEE IT! CLOSER, NOW...

DOWN, DOWN, AND CLOSER, DAN... YOU'RE BEGINNING TO SEE ITS FACE! YOU WANT TO CLOSE YOUR EYES, BUT CAN'T! YOU WANT TO SCREAM... AND THEN... THEN...

THE END